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ISSUE 80 DECEMBER 2021

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XBOX SERIES X|S

XBOX ONE

NINTENDO SWITCH

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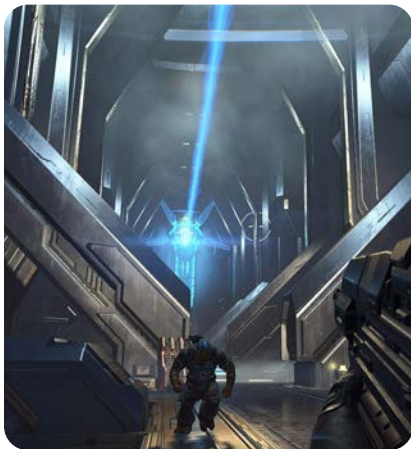
PETOOONS
STUDIO



Peppa Pig created by Mark Baker and Neville Astley

welcome

FROM THE EDITORS



ACHIEVEMENT UNLOCKED

Though we pride ourselves on covering a wide variety of games for all consoles here at *Walmart Gamecenter*, we'd be remiss if we let a special milestone pass by without special celebration. This year—specifically November 15th—marks the 20th anniversary of Xbox.

While the earliest gaming consoles had their origins in the U.S., following the collapse and revival of the home gaming market in the 1980s, it was Japan that dominated the scene. For many years, Nintendo, Sega, and (eventually) Sony were the only real major players.

That is, until Microsoft arrived. With the launch of the Xbox in fall 2001, one of the biggest companies in computing sought to prove it could carve out a foothold in the gaming market. Four console generations later, the effort has been a wild success, not just in terms of the amount of hardware sold, but in Xbox's influence on the broader market.

So many of the features we take for granted these days originated on Xbox. The concept of achievements, now offered on

many PC platforms and as trophies on PlayStation, started with the Xbox 360. Xbox Live was the first premium online gaming service for consoles, introducing cross-game features like friends lists and party chat. Xbox Live Arcade helped pave the way for indie games and smaller downloadable titles on consoles. Microsoft continues to innovate today as well, with its Netflix-style Xbox Game Pass service offering access to a large, revolving catalog of games for a single fee, with first-party exclusives available to subscribers on day one.

The history of Xbox has also changed the kinds of games we play. One of the games that helped solidify Microsoft as a contender arrived the same day as that first Xbox: *Halo: Combat Evolved*. Though it hardly invented the first-person shooter, the game's massive popularity cemented Master Chief as an icon and multiplayer shooters as one of the most popular genres on consoles—a position they still hold today.

In this issue's cover story, we take an in-depth look at the latest entry in that franchise, *Halo Infinite*, which seeks to capture the magic of the earliest games in the series while delivering substantial updates to gameplay in both campaign and multiplayer.

Of course, if you prefer to game on other platforms, there's plenty for you throughout this issue, too. We preview FromSoftware's hugely anticipated fantasy action RPG, *Elden Ring*, spotlight some stellar titles in this month's Five to Play, and take a look back at one of the year's best PlayStation exclusives, *Deathloop*, in our Parting Shots interview.

No matter your console of choice, be sure to keep reading *Walmart Gamecenter*, the magazine that keeps you at the center of all things gaming.

Josh Harmon and Mollie L Patterson

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Walmart
Gamecenter
december 2021

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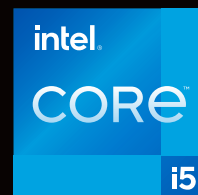


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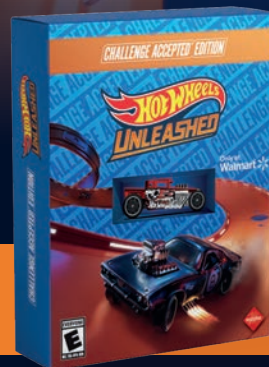
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NINTENDO SWITCH ONLINE EXPANDS WITH N64 GAMES AND MORE

Nintendo has leveled up Nintendo Switch Online. While the company will continue to offer the current version of its paid membership program—which includes access to online multiplayer and a selection of NES and Super NES classics to play on Switch consoles—a new premium offering now adds even more benefits.

Called Nintendo Switch Online + Expansion Pack, the new higher membership

tier includes a wider selection of beloved games to play from additional platforms. In a widely anticipated move, Nintendo is using the Expansion Pack to introduce Nintendo 64 titles on Switch. The launch lineup includes some of the most beloved games ever made, including *Super Mario 64*, *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, and *Star Fox 64*, but that's just the start. Future updates will bring *Banjo-Kazooie*, *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask*, and *Paper Mario* to the service, among many more titles.

What was completely unexpected, however, is the other platform that makes up the new Expansion Pack game library: Sega Genesis. Yes, Nintendo is teaming up with one-time rival Sega to bring even more beloved retro games to Switch. The starting lineup of Genesis games features *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*, *Streets of Rage 2*, *Ecco the Dolphin*, *Castlevania: Bloodlines*, *Golden Axe*, and nine other titles. Any Genesis fan knows it's a stellar lineup, one that makes the Switch a go-to platform for classics not just from Nintendo's own history, but from the entire 16-bit era.

To help complete your classic gaming experience, Nintendo is also selling two new wireless controllers for the Switch,



one based on the N64's three-pronged gamepad, and one based on the Sega Genesis's three-button controller. As with Nintendo's previous retro-inspired controllers, you'll need an active Nintendo Switch Online subscription to purchase either the Nintendo 64 or Sega Genesis controller.

Nintendo will also introduce other benefits to Expansion Pack subscribers, with the first being free access to *Animal Crossing: New Horizons' Happy Home Paradise* expansion.

You can browse a wide selection of Nintendo Switch hardware and games and purchase a Nintendo Switch Online subscription on Walmart.com or at your local Walmart store.



10+ Million Copies of *Resident Evil VII* that have now been sold worldwide, making it the first game in the franchise to hit that number without remasters/re-releases

£2,060 Cost for an official replica of Ellie's Taylor guitar from *The Last of Us Part II*, as sold by PlayStation Europe

7680x4320 Internal render resolution for *The Tourist* on PlayStation 5, making it the first console game to hit 8K

150,000+ Lines of dialogue in Bethesda's upcoming sci-fi RPG *Starfield*, according to creative director Todd Howard

89

The final number of fighters playable in *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate* with the inclusion of Sora from *Kingdom Hearts*

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Walmart*
release
calendar

NOV

19 BATTLEFIELD 2042
EA / XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, XBOX ONE, PS4, PC19 POKÉMON BRILLIANT DIAMOND +
SHINING PEARL
NINTENDO / SWITCH

DEC

8 HALO INFINITE
XBOX GAME STUDIOS / XBOX SERIES X/S, XBOX
ONE, PC

JAN

28 POKÉMON LEGENDS: ARCEUS
NINTENDO, THE POKÉMON COMPANY / SWITCH

FEB

1 LIFE IS STRANGE: REMASTERED COLLECTION
SQUARE ENIX / XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, SWITCH,
XBOX ONE, PS4, PC4 DYING LIGHT 2 STAY HUMAN
TECHLAND / XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, XBOX ONE,
PS4, PC17 THE KING OF FIGHTERS XV
SNK / XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, PS418 HORIZON FORBIDDEN WEST
SONY INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT / PS5, PS425 ELDEN RING
BANDAI NAMCO / XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, XBOX
ONE, PS4, PC25 SAINTS ROW
DEEP SILVER / XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, XBOX
ONE, PS4, PC

MAR

4 GRAN TURISMO 7
SONY INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT / PS5, PS44 TRIANGLE STRATEGY
SQUARE ENIX / SWITCHBLUEPOINT JOINS SONY—AND CHARTS
NEW FUTURE

PlayStation Studios has been on a buying spree this year, already adding *Returnal* developer Housemarque and porting specialists Nixxes to its stable. Now, Sony has finalized yet another acquisition: Bluepoint Games, best known for its work on updated versions of older games, like *Uncharted: The Nathan Drake Collection*, *Gravity Rush Remastered*, and the *Shadow of the Colossus* remake.

“With each of its projects, Bluepoint has raised the bar on console-defining visuals and gameplay, and the studio’s vast expertise in world building and character creation



will be a huge plus,” PlayStation Studios head Herman Hulst said in a statement.

News of the acquisition included a surprising detail: Bluepoint’s first title with PlayStation Studios *won’t* be an update of an existing game. “Our next project, we’re working on original content right now. We can’t talk about what that is, but that’s the next step in the evolution for us,” Bluepoint president Marco Thrush told *IGN*.

Of course, that project is likely years off. In the meantime, you can buy the studio’s remake of *Demon’s Souls* for PS5 on Walmart.com or at your local Walmart store.



FIFA NO MORE?

As part of an announcement celebrating the launch of *EA Sports FIFA 22*, the publisher behind the game made a surprising announcement about the series’ future. Cam Weber, the top executive at the EA Sports label, revealed that this year’s game may be the last to launch with the iconic FIFA branding.

“We’re also exploring the idea of renaming our global EA Sports football

games,” Weber wrote. “This means we’re reviewing our naming rights agreement with FIFA, which is separate from all our other official partnerships and licenses across the football world.” In other words, even if the name changes, the teams and players would still be based on their real-world counterparts.

What could the new title be? Eagle-eyed investigators quickly discovered

trademark filings in both the UK and Europe for the term “EA Sports FC.” There’s no guarantee that will be the new name—if EA follows through on the change at all—but it’s probably the most likely option.

For now, you can pick up *FIFA 22* at Walmart.com or your local Walmart store.





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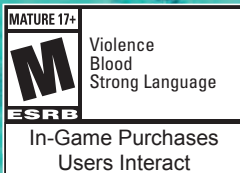
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POKÉMON BRILLIANT DIAMOND & POKÉMON SHINING PEARL

PUBLISHER NINTENDO / DEVELOPER ILCA / PLATFORMS SWITCH / RELEASE DATE 11.19.2021

As the qualifiers in their titles suggest, yes, these are new versions of 2006's *Pokémon Diamond* and *Pokémon Pearl* made for your Switch. But they're not just the original DS games ported directly to Nintendo's flagship system. While they do have the same story—with Dialga being the star of *Brilliant Diamond*, and Palkia taking that role in *Shining Pearl*—both have gotten a visual upgrade worthy of 15 years of waiting. Both games also boast a revamped version of the Underground, now called the Grand Underground, where players can dig up fossils and other treasures. Similarly, the Secret Base mechanic has been improved as well, and now has Pokémon visible when walking around, much like in *Pokémon Sword* and *Pokémon Shield*. You can even show off your performing skills in Super Contest Shows. Best of all, you can now battle and trade with fellow Pokémon trainers both in person and online.

These are new versions of 2006's *Pokémon Diamond* and *Pokémon Pearl* made for your Switch.

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 **GAMES**





CALL OF DUTY: VANGUARD

PUBLISHER ACTIVISION / DEVELOPER SLEDGEHAMMER GAMES / PLATFORMS XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, XBOX ONE, PS4, PC / RELEASE DATE 11.05.2021

"*Call of Duty: Vanguard's* campaign is focused on telling the origin story of the Special Forces coming from all the theaters of WWII, which gives it a broader global perspective. In every level there's a new and interesting mechanic. We have one mission, for instance, that's entirely based on dogfighting, while the one in Stalingrad has a new traversal mechanic. With 'Zombies,' Treyarch are telling more of the Dark Aether story, and there's not only some cool things happening visually, but they've added some interesting new genre-twists to the gameplay. Then, with multiplayer, we have two new modes: 'Champion Hill,' which is a mix of 'Battle Royale' and 'Gunfight,' with small-squad combat in which the last team standing wins; and 'Patrol,' which *Call of Duty* veterans can think of as 'Hardpoint' with a zone that moves around the map. We're also scaling player counts up and down based on map size."

JOE SALUD, ART DIRECTOR, SLEDGEHAMMER GAMES

"*Call of Duty: Vanguard's* campaign is focused on telling the origin story of the Special Forces coming from all the theaters of WWII, which gives it a broader global perspective."

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FORZA HORIZON 5

PUBLISHER XBOX GAME STUDIOS / DEVELOPER PLAYGROUND GAMES / PLATFORMS XBOX SERIES X/S, XBOX ONE, PC / RELEASE DATE 11.09.2021

“Mexico is almost like the whole world in one country: with snowy peaks, tropical jungles, epic canyons, beautiful beaches, ancient architecture, and modern cities. And *Forza Horizon 5*’s open world authentically captures the diverse, vibrant landscapes of the country, while providing players the perfect backdrop to have fun driving. *Horizon* has always been about exploration, and *Forza Horizon 5*’s vibrant and diverse world—which is 50 percent larger than before—invites players to explore living deserts, lush jungles, historic cities, and more. In addition to the incredibly diverse weather and geography of Mexico, *Forza Horizon 5* has a deep campaign; we’re able to pack so much more into every area of the world. The power of the Xbox Series X and S also allows us to pack much more detail and realism, all the way down to the smallest details, such as how the light glows through each needle on a cholla cactus.”

 MIKE BROWN, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, PLAYGROUND GAMES

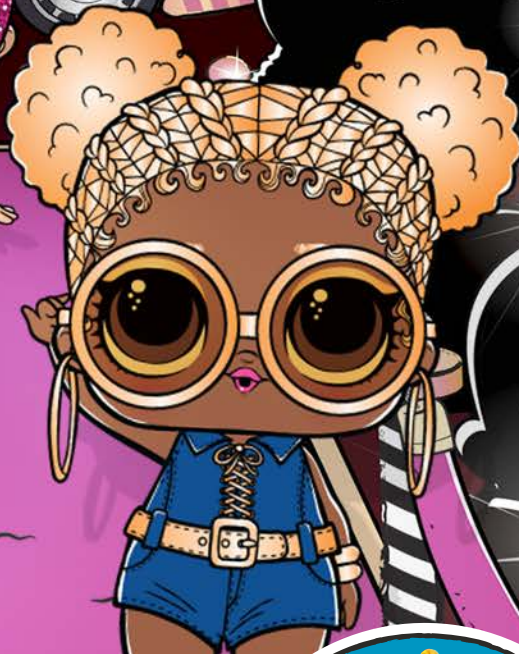
“The power of the Xbox Series X and S also allows us to pack much more detail and realism, all the way down to the smallest details, such as how the light glows through each needle on a cholla cactus.”



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SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI V

PUBLISHER SEGA / DEVELOPER ATLUS / PLATFORMS SWITCH / RELEASE DATE 11.12.2021

“Set in modern-day Tokyo, Japan (and a horrifying, bleak netherworld that exists in its shadow), *Shin Megami Tensei V* is about a clash between demons, gods, and angels at the end of our world, and a couple teenagers and adults caught in the crossfire. Partnered with a powerful demon, you’ll forge your own path in a battle between mythic forces to dictate the fate of the world. Aside from the clear leap in graphical detail, *SMTV* has more demons than ever. This JRPG series is infamous for letting you talk to demons mid-battle to convince them to join your side, and *SMTV* features old favorites, new additions, and revamped designs from various cultures and mythologies from across the world. It’s not just claustrophobic corridors and haunting, minimalist maps anymore, either. The eerie netherworld of Da’at is teeming with wrecked cityscapes, demonic hordes, secrets to find, and several different regions, all explorable in free-roaming third-person view.”

JOHN MORALIS, LEAD EDITOR, SEGA OF AMERICA

“Partnered with a powerful demon, you’ll forge your own path in a battle between mythic forces to dictate the fate of the world.”

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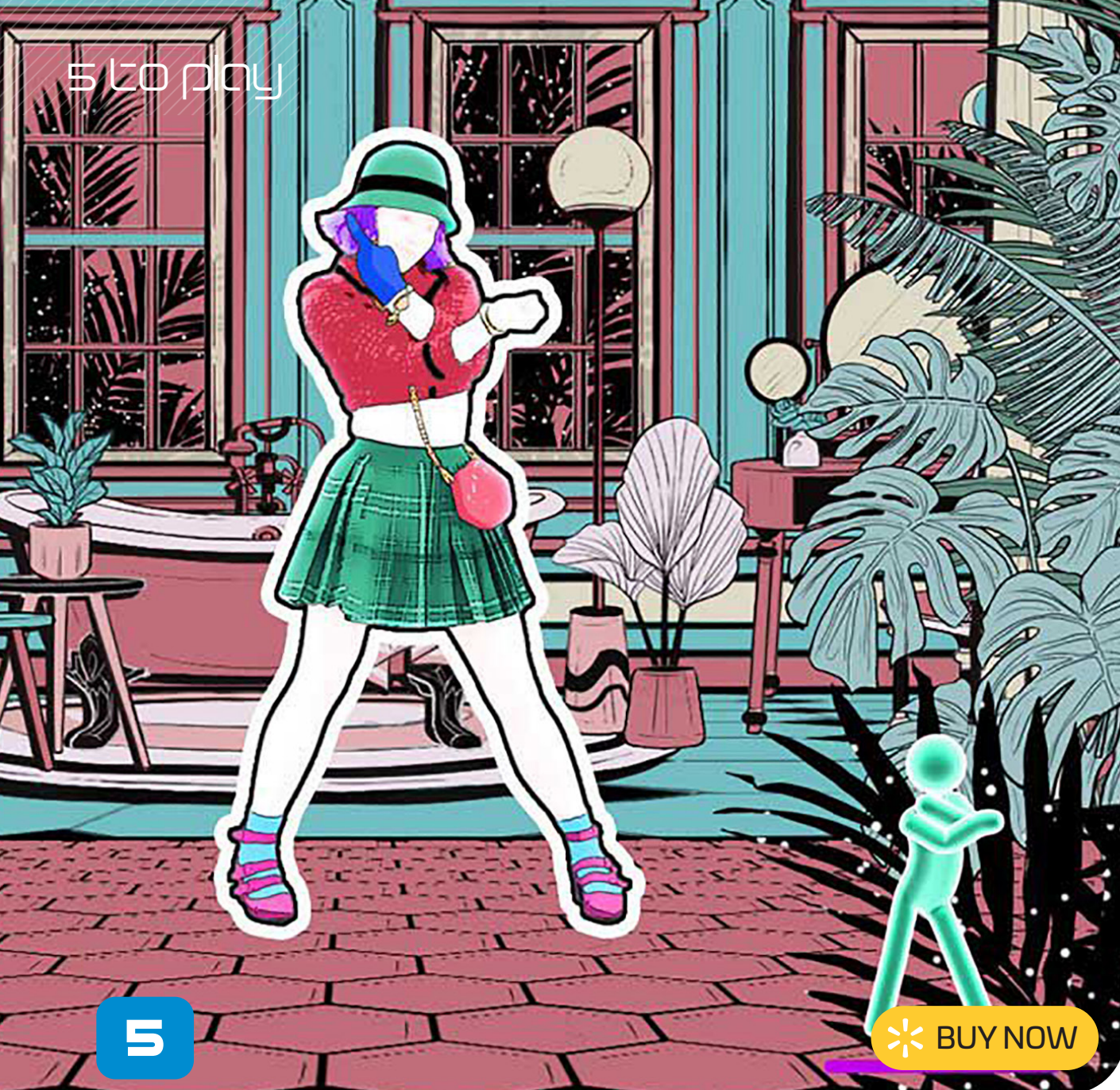
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JUST DANCE 2022

PUBLISHER UBISOFT / DEVELOPER UBISOFT PARIS, UBISOFT PUNE, UBISOFT SHANGHAI, ROOM8 / PLATFORMS XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, SWITCH, XBOX ONE, PS4 / RELEASE DATE 11.04.2021

Ubisoft's long-running *Just Dance* series is all about skillfully following the complex dance moves of on-screen dancers, and its latest installment promises to feature a good mix of funky tunes. And a rather eclectic one, too. Not only does it have such recent booty shakers as Dua Lipa's "Levitating," Zara Larsson's "Poster Girl," and "Girl Like Me" by the Black Eyed Peas and Shakira—as well as an exclusive new version of Todrick Hall's "Nails, Hair, Hips, Heels"—but it goes back in time for such dance-floor staples as Beyoncé's empowering 2011 track "Run the World (Girls)," Katy Perry's 2011 party anthem "Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)," and Justin Timberlake's 2003 banger "Rock Your Body." But for those old enough to know 2011 and 2003 weren't that long ago, things get really classic with Bronski Beat's 1984 "Smalltown Boy" and disco queen Sylvester's iconic 1978 "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)."

It goes back in time for such dance-floor staples as Beyoncé's empowering 2011 track "Run the World (Girls)," [and] Katy Perry's 2011 party anthem "Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)."



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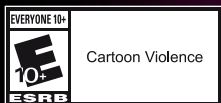
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A close-up, low-angle shot of Master Chief's helmet and upper torso. The helmet is olive green with a large, reflective visor that shows a bright orange light. The armor is highly detailed with various panels and textures. The background is dark and out of focus.

cover story

* PREORDER

HALO INFINITE

HAIL TO THE CHIEF

BY MICHAEL GOROFF

“A lot of the story unfolds over the course of the game, so fans new and old are learning things at the same pace.”

PAUL CROCKER, HALO INFINITE CAMPAIGN'S ASSOCIATE CREATIVE DIRECTOR



FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
XBOX GAME STUDIOS
DEVELOPER
343 INDUSTRIES
PLATFORMS
XBOX SERIES X/S,
XBOX ONE, PC
RELEASE DATE
12.08.2021

When it first announced *Halo Infinite*, developer 343 Industries called it a “spiritual reboot.” The phrase resonated with longtime fans of the series, who felt that the last couple of *Halo* games just didn’t feel like *Halo*. The idea of recapturing the magic that made the first three (or four, if you count *Reach*) *Halo* games so special caused the die-hards to salivate.

Infinite is just around the corner after a year-long delay, and 343 Industries has been working hard to give fans the *Halo* game they crave.

That’s clear enough in the team’s approach to *Halo Infinite*’s campaign.

Taking place on Zeta Halo, the story sees Master Chief going head-to-head against a new (at least, new to him) enemy in the Banished, led by the terrifying warchief Escharum. At the same time, Master Chief is trying to track down his companion-AI-gone-rogue, Cortana, to find out what happened to her.

While the campaign continues the overarching narrative that kicked off with *Halo: Combat Evolved*, it also represents a fresh start for players new to the series. “A lot of the story unfolds over the course of the game, so fans new and old are learning things at the same pace,” said the campaign’s associate creative direc-

■ The story that unfolds on Zeta Halo will still be linear, but environments will allow for more open exploration than in prior games.

ARMED TO THE CHIEF

Almost as iconic as Master Chief's shiny green armor is *Halo's* long list of weapons. *Halo Infinite* brings back some of the most popular in the series' history, but it's adding a couple of new options to spice things up.

SKEWER

This bad boy is every Razorback and Ghost driver's worst nightmare. Essentially a high-powered harpoon gun, the Skewer can not only one-shot enemies (without requiring a headshot like the sniper rifle), but it can also send enemy vehicles flying.

HEATWAVE

A new shotgun in *Halo Infinite*, the Heatwave has some unique properties. You can determine whether the gun's spread fires in a horizontal or vertical pattern. Those launched projectiles will then bounce off surfaces, meaning you can get a killshot from around the corner.

SHOCK RIFLE

This multipurpose weapon can let you land precision shots against enemies in the distance, and its electricity-based damage can also arc off and hit other nearby targets. It might not be the highest-damage weapon in the game, but it can sure be annoying for the enemy team if used correctly.

NEEDLER



It wouldn't be a proper *Halo* game without the Needler. While it seems to function pretty much exactly as it does in prior outings, lead sandbox designer Quinn DelHoyo said that when you see someone coming at you with a Needler in *Halo Infinite*, "you know it's trouble."

GRAVITY HAMMER AND ENERGY SWORD

Both of *Halo's* iconic close-quarter melee weapons are back in *Halo Infinite*. Let's get ready to rumble.



"We love the Pilot because he's just a human like us, no special training, no Spartan abilities, and he's thrust into this incredibly dangerous situation."

PAUL CROCKER, HALO INFINITE CAMPAIGN'S ASSOCIATE CREATIVE DIRECTOR

tor, Paul Crocker. "*Infinite* doesn't require extensive knowledge of *Halo* lore."

Likewise, several new characters will serve as audience surrogates. One of them is the Pilot, a normal, non-Spartan dude who finds Master Chief stranded in space and ends up getting dragged into the action on Zeta Halo.

"We love the Pilot because he's just a human like us—no special training, no Spartan abilities, and he's thrust into this incredibly dangerous situation," Crocker said. "Seeing how he reacts and grows over the course of the game is a counterpoint to the

Master Chief and an important part of the overall theme."

Master Chief's other new ally is his new companion AI called The Weapon. According to Crocker, the UNSC—Earth's spacefaring military force—sent The Weapon to Zeta Halo to track down Cortana, but "something went awry." *Halo Infinite* sees Master Chief and The Weapon working together "to uncover the mystery of what happened to Cortana and learn more about the Banished's intentions."

The Banished are not totally new to the *Halo* franchise—they serve as the main antagonists in the *Halo*



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Wars series of real-time strategy spin-offs—but Master Chief, and thus fans who have only played the main-line *Halo* titles, have never encountered them before.

Being from a splinter group of the Covenant, some of the enemy types might look familiar, but the Banished are “particularly brutal and tactically brilliant,” Crocker said. “While the Covenant was driven by dogma, the Banished are singularly driven to destroy both humanity and the Covenant. A foe [who is] that focused is relentless.”

The Banished’s leader, Escharum, is the most formidable foe that Master Chief has ever faced. Crocker didn’t want to give away too much about Escharum, but he did tell us that the warchief “easily defeated some of the UNSC’s very best forces

at Zeta Halo, and if he gains control of the Ring, it will threaten all of humanity.”

Halo Infinite is giving players a lot more freedom on Zeta than previous games in the series. Players can freely roam around and explore the open-world map, though the story is told in a linear fashion, with specific missions for Master Chief to complete.

Crocker said that it was important to retain the series’ signature action and setpieces while also giving players more freedom. “There are some level design techniques that we employ to make sure players have those wonderful, memorable moments that stick with them after they finish the main campaign.”

Of course, *Halo Infinite*’s campaign is only one half of the equation. The



■ Expect to pilot some familiar vehicles, like the speedy Ghost hoverbike, in both campaign and multiplayer.

“There are some level design techniques that we employ to make sure players have those wonderful, memorable moments that stick with them after they finish the main campaign.”

PAUL CROCKER, HALO INFINITE CAMPAIGN'S ASSOCIATE CREATIVE DIRECTOR



YOU'RE GONNA GET SOME HOP-ONS

With the return of Big Team Battle and the introduction of open-world exploration on Zeta Halo, the franchise's iconic vehicles are more important than ever in *Halo Infinite*. When it came to designing the vehicles, the “biggest key [was] making sure they fit into our sandbox and making them fun to drive and fly,” lead sandbox designer Quinn DelHoyo said.

Of course, players on the ground aren't completely vulnerable to those behind the wheel. In addition to weapons like the Skewer and the Rocket Launcher, players have new tools to deal with enemies in vehicles.

The Grappleshot, for instance, has already led to some hilarious highlight clips popping up online from *Halo Infinite*'s technical test. Connecting the Grappleshot's line to a vehicle automatically lets you hijack that vehicle in a new maneuver called “grapple-jacking.” DelHoyo said you can also use the Grappleshot to pick up special weapons and explosive barrels.

franchise is perhaps better known for its paradigm-shifting multiplayer, and 343 Industries has worked hard to make sure that *Infinite*'s multiplayer recaptures the magic of the older titles.

One area where that's most obvious is in *Infinite*'s multiplayer maps. Whether they're for the 4v4 Arena modes or 12v12 Big Team Battles, many of the designers that have crafted *Infinite*'s maps are themselves fans of the franchise, multiplayer associate creative director Tom French said.

“Many of the maps themselves have a ‘classic’ vibe to them because the team came in as fans of the *Halo* games that made them want to build levels in the first place,” French said.

“Sometimes we deliberately aim to create many of the same ‘feels’ we all had playing those games we fell in love with, while still evolving the spaces to suit *Infinite* gameplay.”

Halo Infinite is also bringing back classic weapons from the series, such as the Needler and the Gravity Hammer, while adding a handful of new ones for players to master. Those include the Skewer, which fires a high-velocity spear, as well as the Heatwave, a shotgun that fires rounds that ricochet around corners.

Lead sandbox designer Quinn DelHoyo knows the legacy that *Halo* weapons have in gaming, and part of the challenge was figuring out how the new weapons fit in. “*Halo* weapons are truly iconic,” DelHoyo

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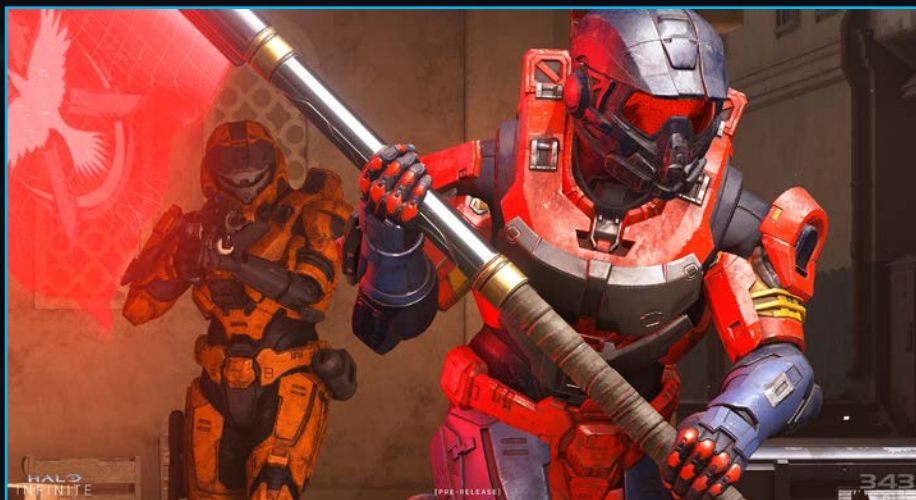
ENGAGING SLIPSPACE

Halo Infinite isn't exciting just because it's a new *Halo* game. It also ushers in a new era for 343 Industries in the form of the Slipspace Engine.

Longtime fans of the franchise will recognize Slipspace as the interdimensional system that allows for faster-than-light travel. Like its namesake, the Slipspace Engine is allowing 343's engineers to do things that they previously couldn't imagine.

One of the Slipspace Engine's most important features is how it allows for more detailed facial animations. This might be ironic, considering the series' main character almost never shows his face. But for giving life to characters like the Pilot, who is the emotional core of *Halo Infinite*'s campaign, this new tech is irreplaceable.

On top of that, the Slipspace Engine also allows 343's campaign and level designers to give Zeta Halo a sense of scale that was otherwise impossible on older engines.



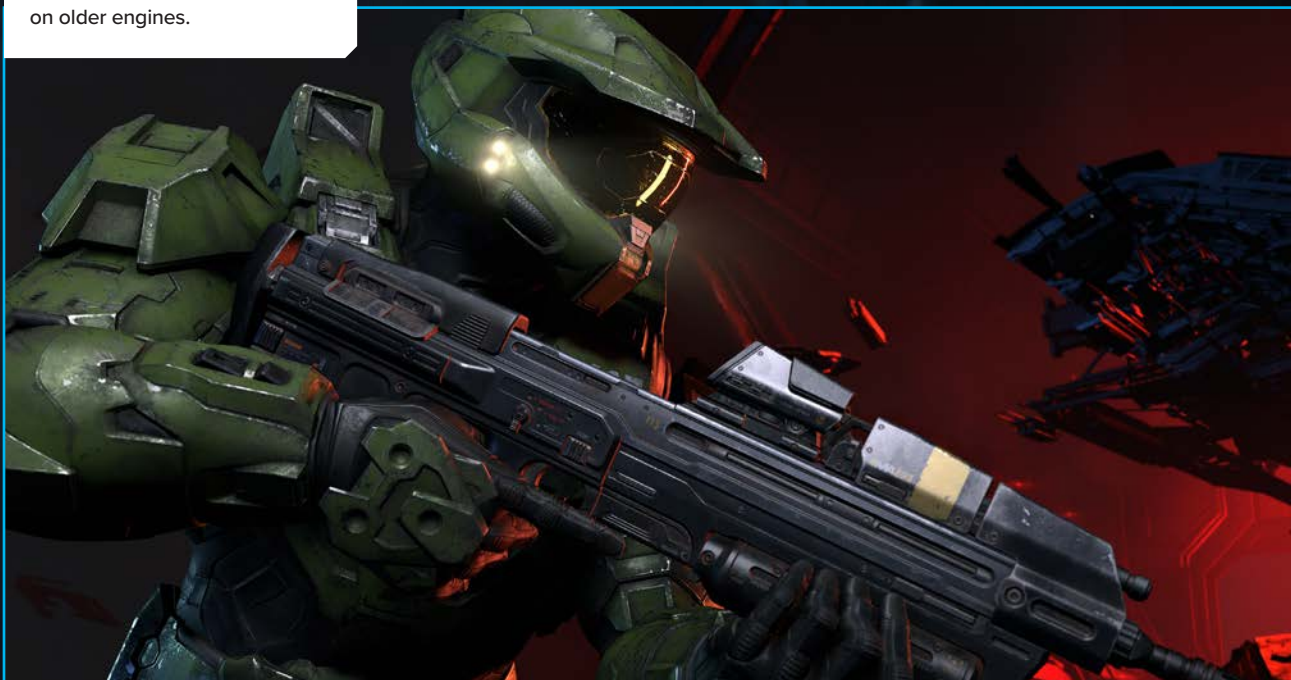
said. "Our goal is for every weapon in the game to have a purpose that makes it stand out... We have to ask ourselves what problems we need to solve for, then make the coolest weapons we can that fit the bill."

The biggest change coming to *Halo Infinite*'s multiplayer is that it will be free-to-play whether or not you buy the campaign. Additionally, it will feature cross-play between console generations and PC, as well as cross-progression so players can retain their stats and unlocks across multiple platforms.

Removing these barriers and allowing anyone with an Xbox or a PC to play with their friends was a main focus for the team. "*Halo* has always had a great community," French said, "and we want to grow that community with *Halo Infinite*."

In every regard, *Halo Infinite* is looking to bridge the gap between the past, present, and future of the series. And that means a lot of players will be able to enjoy it. "We're looking forward to inviting the biggest audience ever for a *Halo* game," French said. [G](#)

■ Even older game modes like Capture the Flag will feel fresh thanks to the tactics enabled by new gadgets like the Grappleshot.





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preview

✱ PREORDER

ELDEN RING

AS THE FIRE FADES, THE RING RISES

BY MOLLIE L PATTERSON

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
BANDAI NAMCO
DEVELOPER
FROMSOFTWARE
PLATFORMS
XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5,
XBOX ONE, PS4, PC
RELEASE DATE
02.25.2022

In *Elden Ring*, [FromSoftware] has teamed up with best-selling fantasy writer George R.R. Martin to craft an adventure as strong in its story as it is its swordplay.



Once a relatively obscure developer in the West, Japanese studio FromSoftware became a well-known name thanks to games such as its action RPG *Dark Souls*, which introduced new gameplay concepts while reinventing genre traditions.

Now, director Hidetaka Miyazaki and his team are once again looking to lead gamers around the globe into unexpected territory—and this time, they'll have help in doing so. In *Elden Ring*, they've teamed up with best-selling fantasy writer George R.R. Martin to craft an adventure as strong in its story as it is its sword-





play. The tale unfolds in a fantasy realm known as the Lands Between, a dark and dangerous world that promises to be far bigger than anything seen in FromSoftware's previous titles. There, the offspring of Queen Marika the Eternal have claimed shards of the shattered Elden Ring, its power twisting them into monsters.

The task of bringing peace back to the land falls on the shoulders of the player's custom character. Of course, this being a FromSoftware game, "saving the world from evil" never quite works out the way it sounds. We also can't begin to predict what twists and turns Martin's contributions will bring to the narrative, which is said to be a more integral part of

■ In almost any other game, this could be a terrifying end boss; in *Elden Ring*, it'll probably be a standard foe in the tutorial.

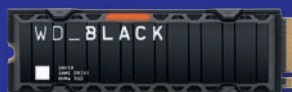
the experience than the more subtle story hints of the *Souls* games.

Thankfully, one thing that won't change in *Elden Ring* is the team's dedication to crafting a robust combat system. Much like the *Souls* games, *Bloodborne*, and *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*, FromSoftware looks to be putting a lot of work into making sure fights feel technical,



Of course, this being a FromSoftware game, "saving the world from evil" never quite works out the way it sounds.

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THE LORDS OF THE RING

While, for many, FromSoftware's *Souls* games have been primarily about a lone warrior fighting against fate, aspects of multiplayer have been a part of the experience ever since the original *Demon's Souls*.

So, what will *Elden Ring* offer those who don't want to fight the horrors of the Lands Between alone? We know that the game is set to feature a more streamlined system for calling in friends to help, with up to two other Tarnished—the game's term for playable characters—able to join you at any time. (You will, however, need to leave your horse behind when dabbling in multiplayer.)

And if you don't have specific friends that you'd like to call upon for help, *Elden Ring* will also offer more extensive options for finding teammates. From how we understand it, you'll be able to select specific keywords (no doubt related to your personal style of play) that will match you up with other players, creating the possibility for actual communities to grow up around shared keywords.



satisfying, and brutal. *Elden Ring*'s heroes will have some new tricks up their armored sleeves as well, such as the ability to summon a spirit steed that not only makes traveling the land faster, but also comes into play during combat. And—though it may seem beneath some warriors—there might even be some stealthier tactics one can employ, depending on the situation.

While it seems, at least for now, that *Elden Ring* will bring about the end of the reign of *Dark Souls*, that series' fire now fades so that a new saga may spark to life. We cannot yet know all of the ways that FromSoftware and George R.R. Martin's efforts will challenge us as players, but we're counting down the days until its release early next year so that we may find out. [G](#)

■ Even without having played it yet, we already know that *Elden Ring*'s combat is sure to be stellar.

While it seems, at least for now, that *Elden Ring* will bring about the end of the reign of *Dark Souls*, that series' fire now fades so that a new saga may spark to life.

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GAME OF THE MONTH

SUPER MONKEY BALL BANANA MANIA

ROLLING WITH THE BUNCHES

BY MOLLIE L PATTERSON

Amidst all of the big, bombastic releases hitting every platform as we get closer to the end of the year, *Super Monkey Ball Banana Mania* feels like a bit of an oddity. Rather than offering up an epic story about saving the world or complex online competitive modes, it's a simple game about a group of monkeys rolling their way through a variety of stages in search of bananas.

And, sometimes, that's exactly what's called for. *Super Monkey Ball Banana Mania* isn't the kind of game you'll sit down and invest hours into, but instead is something fun and light-hearted for when you want a change of pace. In its main mode, *Banana Mania* remasters more than 300 stages from 2005's *Super Monkey Ball Deluxe*, which itself brought together

the content from the original two *Super Monkey Ball* games. Across those hundreds of stages, main monkeys AiAi and Mee Mee, their friends, and some special Sega cameos roll around trying to collect bananas and get a faster clear time while avoiding falling off into oblivion.

Well, really, it's *you* as the player who must accomplish all of those tasks. Rather than directly controlling those balled monkeys, you manipulate the entire stage itself, making your character roll in different directions. It's a simple premise that surprisingly holds up all of the way through, so long as you come at the game in chunks. Some stages *do* get exceptionally challenging, but that's part of the fun.

In addition to the main story, challenge, practice, and special modes,

Super Monkey Ball Banana Mania offers up a selection of party games for up to four players. While some are a little gimmicky, others are genuinely great, and the wide variety of choices give the game some legitimate extra value. From there, you can compete for high scores through online rankings, and spend earned in-game credits to unlock new costume items, characters, ball designs, and more.

If there's anything that throws a monkey wrench into all this, it's that the controls don't quite feel as tight as we remember them from the original games. It's also hard not to wish for more camera options, especially one that would zoom out to see more of the stages. Still, those are relatively minor complaints for all the funky monkey fun that awaits in *Super Monkey Ball Banana Mania*. Sure, it's not one of the heavy hitters of the video game world, but it's a great game to relax with when you need a break from the big stuff. [G](#)

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER

SEGA

DEVELOPER

SEGA

PLATFORMS

XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5,
SWITCH, XBOX ONE,
PS4, PC

RELEASE DATE

10.05.2021

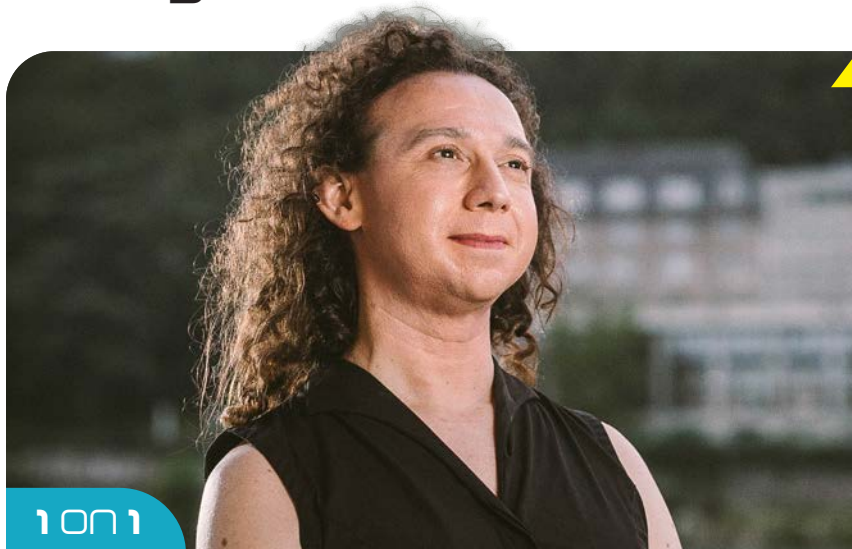
Banana Mania remasters of more than 300 stages from 2005's *Super Monkey Ball Deluxe*.



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1 ON 1

DANA NIGHTINGALE

CAMPAIGN DESIGNER, ARKANE LYON
CAMPAIGN DESIGNER, DEATHLOOP

With the 2012 release of *Dishonored*, Arkane Studios cemented itself as one of the most imaginative studios in all of gaming. The developer helped lead a renaissance of so-called “immersive sims”—games that emphasize player choice and feature a wealth of ways to interact with environments and solve problems. Inspired by classics of the genre like *Thief* and *Deus Ex*, the *Dishonored* series proved the style of game could be refined and polished for a modern audience.

With its latest game, Arkane has managed to both stick to what it does best and turn everything on its head. *Deathloop* features many of the same immersive sim elements of *Dishonored*, with open-ended gameplay and ample rewards for exploring its imaginative world, the island of Blackreef. But the addition of a new conceit, a time loop, makes the game feel surprisingly fresh. Everything hero Colt Vahn does throughout the game is in service of solving one big mystery: figuring out how to assassinate eight targets in a single, time-twisting day so he can escape the loop.

To help unravel the mysteries of Blackreef, we sat down with Arkane designer Dana Nightingale, who helped devise the game’s central “murder puzzle.”

WGC: *Deathloop* is a game that’s both easy to recommend (because it’s great) and hard to explain when you’re recommending it (because it’s got a high-concept, ambitious design that defies simple genre labels or comparisons). What’s the shortest pitch you can give someone who hasn’t played the game that still captures what *Deathloop* really is?

Dana Nightingale: *Deathloop* is an action adventure where the player must unravel a central mystery through the discovery of clues and following leads, all while blasting enemies to bits with a wide arsenal of firearms, gadgets, and otherworldly powers.

WGC: The “time loop” concept has become a lot more common in movies, TV shows, and games in the past few years. Why do you think it appeals to people? What made you choose to build *Deathloop* around it?

DN: A time loop allows a storyteller to fully explore one scenario from many angles, while inviting a player to achieve mastery of a given challenge. It may also appeal to people’s feelings of being trapped in a never-ending situation and having the

“A time loop allows a storyteller to fully explore one scenario from many angles, while inviting a player to achieve mastery of a given challenge.”

GAME HIGHLIGHTS

DISHONORED, DISHONORED 2,
DISHONORED: DEATH OF THE OUTSIDER

power to break free of it if they do just the right thing.

WGC: In classic Arkane fashion, there are usually many ways to approach an objective in *Deathloop*. What’s your favorite example of this open-ended sandbox approach from the game?

DN: Frank Spicer, our resident rock star, has a distrust of the other-worldly powers his fellow Visionaries possess. He’s made it impossible to enter his Ramblin’ Rock Club while wielding any of these powers. You can play it his way, but an observant player will discover there’s always a way around the best security.

WGC: In *Deathloop*, you can play as Julianna and invade other players who are trying to escape the loop as Colt. How do you think that looming threat impacts the experience of playing?

DN: From a narrative perspective, having the game’s antagonist, Julianna, appear regularly throughout the game makes her oath to protect the loop clear and present, rather than her simply being a boss lurking at the end of the game. Gameplay-wise, it means you always have to be ready to improvise. You may know the exact kit you need to tackle the part of the game ahead of you, but any Julianna [invasion] may require a radically different set of tools to handle.

WGC: Many of the Visionaries on Blackreef have Slab powers that reflect their personalities. If you had your own Slab, what would it be called and what power would it give you?

DN: My slab would have the power to transform any meeting into an email or any email into a meeting. Wait, no. It would make the snooze button on my alarm transport me nine minutes back in time. Wait, wait, no, it would let me conjure up a perfect cup of coffee from thin air, anywhere, any time. Actually, let me get back to you on this one.



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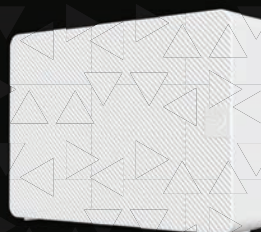
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